

Rep. Slaughter Delivers National Democratic Radio Address

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Good morning. I'm Congresswoman Louise Slaughter of New York, Ranking Member on the House Rules Committee.

As Americans, we have a right to expect that our government will be defined by the integrity of its office holders.

And yet today, we are suffering the consequences of what may be the worst corruption in the history of our Congress.

By now, you have all heard of the former Majority Leader of the House who was indicted on criminal charges of money laundering, and the Republican Congressman who pled guilty to bribery and resigned in disgrace.

You know about the Republican lobbyist, Jack Abramoff, who just this week pled guilty to charges of bribing public officials, tax evasion, and fraud.

But what we are up against isn't just the shameful work of individuals like these. It's a much broader problem, a problem rooted in the Republican establishment which has held power in our nation's capital for more than a decade.

Sadly, the legacy of Republican rule has been the fundamental degradation of our democratic institutions and the abandonment of our core principles.

Since 1995, Republicans have turned our democratic government into an engine of patronage, not one of responsible policy.

They have linked their Party, and the business of the country, to powerful lobbyists in an unprecedented attempt to eliminate the will of the American people from the legislative process.

Over the last four years, the number of special-interest lobbyists in Washington has doubled, from 17,000 to more than 34,000 today.

There are now 63 lobbyists for each Member of Congress.

Along with the corporations they represent and the numerous Republican legislators they court, lobbyists are now writing the bills that are passed by our Congress.

They have infiltrated every aspect of our government.

Their money and donations shape the opinions of corrupt lawmakers in a way that public opinion no longer does.

Under Republican guidance, America has truly been put up for sale to the highest bidder.

For example, in 2001, our nation's energy policy was written in closed sessions by representatives of major corporations.

These authors thought only of enriching themselves, instead of creating a sound national energy policy.

During the Iraq war, our national security was sacrificed repeatedly by lawmakers who handed out defense contracts to their friends, instead of to those most qualified.

More than 9 billion dollars in Iraq reconstruction funds has disappeared into the black hole of no-bid contracts created by lobbyists and corrupt politicians.

Our potential for success in the Middle East has been diminished as a result.

Today, seniors are struggling to understand a confusing Medicare prescription drug bill written not for the elderly men and women who need help, but for the benefit of insurance and drug companies who don't.

From tax policy, to public television and radio programming, to laws regulating the safety of our drinking water, nothing has proved too precious to avoid being sold for a price.

Clearly, the Republican Culture of Corruption touches all Americans.

We can't afford to go on like this. The time for reform and change is now.

Together, America can do better.

My fellow Democrats and I have fought for an honest and open government, one that is led by Representatives who uphold the highest standards of integrity.

We have fought for real oversight and real ethics reform in Congress.

We have worked to restore integrity to Washington, curb abuses of power, and weaken the influence that lobbyists have over the legislative process.

In the year ahead, Democrats will continue to demand independent commissions to investigate government waste and poor federal responses to emergencies.

And we will fight for the rehabilitation of the ethics process in the House of Representatives.

The House Ethics Committee must get to work immediately to investigate pending ethics and corruption cases in the House, including those involving Members with ties to Jack Abramoff.

This is a necessary first step to restore a high ethical standard to the Congress.

As Democrats, we still believe that integrity should be the defining feature of our democracy, and we know that the American people do, too.

That is why under Democratic leadership, we will create the most open and honest Congress in American history.

I am Congresswoman Louise Slaughter. Thank you for listening.